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ABSTRACT

Juvenile courts in the United States processed more than 1.5 million delinquency cases in 1994, representing a 5% increase over the 1993 caseload and a 41% increase over the number of cases handled in 1985. These figures are taken from "Juvenile Court Statistics, 1994," the latest in a series of annual reports on cases handled by courts with juvenile jurisdiction. These reports focus on the disposition of delinquency cases and formally handled status offense cases. Findings in the report show that the number of homicides handled in U.S. juvenile courts increased 144% between 1985 and 1994. Offenses against persons accounted for 16% of all cases in 1985, but 22% in 1994. The number of cases involving a female juvenile increased 54% between 1985 and 1994, while the number of cases involving a male juvenile increased 38%. Between 1985 and 1994, the number of delinquency cases involving white youth increased 26% and the number involving black youth and other youth of color increased 78% and 94% respectively. These are findings with many implications for those who work with urban youth. Of interest also are figures provided about the processing and disposition of juvenile cases. Of cases that were formally petitioned and scheduled for an adjudicatory or waiver hearing in court, 58% of all formally processed delinquency cases resulted in adjudication, and 1.4% were transferred to adult criminal court. (Contains 18 tables and 4 figures.) (SLD)

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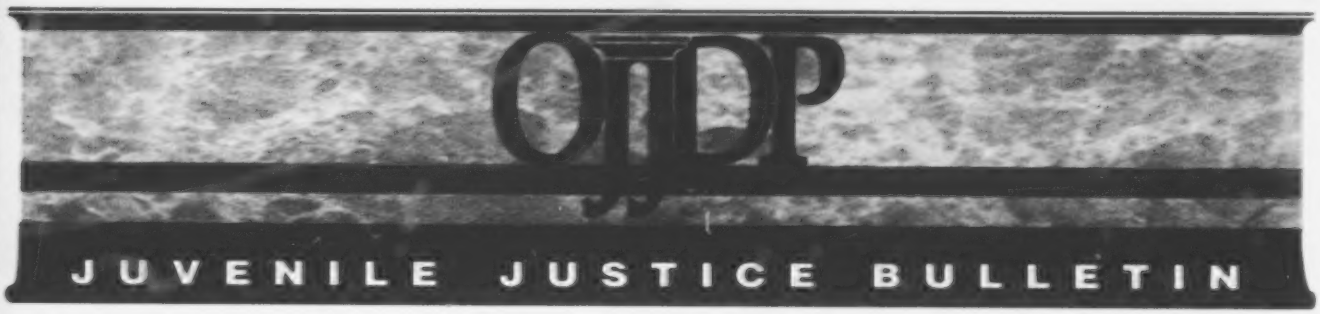

Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1994

Jeffrey A. Butts, Ph.D.

Juvenile courts in the United States processed more than 1.5 million delinquency cases in 1994. This number represented a 5% increase over the 1993 caseload and a 41% increase over the number of cases handled in 1985. More than half (55%) of the delinquency cases disposed by U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction in 1994 were processed formally (that is, a petition was filed charging the youth with delinquency). Of the cases that were formally petitioned and scheduled for an adjudicatory or waiver hearing in juvenile court, 58% were adjudicated delinquent, and slightly more than 1% were transferred to adult criminal court. Transfers to criminal court were more common in cases involving person offenses (2.7%) and drug offenses (1.8%). Of all delinquency cases adjudicated in juvenile court in 1994, 29% resulted in out-of-home placement and 53% were placed on probation.

These statistics are among the findings to be published in *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994*, the latest in a series of annual reports on cases handled by U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction. Although courts with juvenile jurisdiction handle a variety of cases, including abuse, neglect, adoption, and traffic violations, *Juvenile Court Statistics* reports focus on the disposition of delinquency cases and formally handled status offense cases. Each report includes national estimates of the number of cases handled by juvenile courts with an appendix that lists caseload statistics for individual States and jurisdictions within each State.

Findings from *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994* include:

- The number of homicide cases handled in U.S. juvenile courts increased 144% between 1985 and 1994. The homicide caseload was 19% higher in 1994 than in 1990.
- In 22% of delinquency cases processed in 1994, the most serious charge was a person offense. Person offenses accounted for 16% of all cases in 1985.
- The number of cases involving drug offenses increased 35% between 1993 and 1994.
- The number of delinquency cases involving female juveniles increased 54% between 1985 and 1994, while cases involving males increased 38%.
- Juveniles were held in secure detention facilities at some point between referral and disposition in 21% of all delinquency cases disposed in 1994, compared with 20% in 1985.
- Delinquency cases were more likely to be processed formally with the filing of a petition in 1994 than in 1985—55% compared with 46%.
- The number of delinquency cases judicially transferred to criminal court grew 71% between 1985 and 1994, although the chances of a case being transferred in 1994 were the same as in 1985—1.4% of formally processed cases.

From the Administrator

Juvenile courts in the United States processed more than 1.5 million delinquency cases in 1994. The 1994 caseload was 20% larger than that of 1990, and 41% larger than the number of cases handled in 1985. The 1994 delinquency caseload involved the largest proportion of person offense cases seen in the past decade (22%).

Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1994 presents these and other findings from *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994*, the latest in a series of reports analyzing data from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. Data in the Archive are maintained and analyzed by the National Center for Juvenile Justice in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The National Juvenile Court Data Archive is the only comprehensive source of data about youth referred to juvenile courts for delinquent and status offenses.

This Bulletin, and the larger report on which it is based, present important information about the youth seen in the Nation's juvenile courts. Both are offered as guideposts for the public, elected officials, and juvenile justice professionals in law enforcement, the courts, and corrections.

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

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These national estimates of juvenile court cases are based on data from more than 1,800 courts that had jurisdiction over 67% of the U.S. juvenile population in 1994.[1] A case disposed during the calendar year by a court with juvenile jurisdiction represents the unit of count in this study and in each *Juvenile Court Statistics* report. It is possible for an individual youth to have been involved in more than one case during the calendar year. Each case represents a youth processed by a juvenile court on a new referral, regardless of the number of individual offenses contained in that referral. Cases involving multiple offenses are categorized according to the most serious offense. For example, a case involving both a charge of vandalism and a charge of robbery would be characterized as a robbery case. Similarly, cases involving multiple dispositions are categorized according to the most restrictive disposition. A case that resulted in both probation and placement in a residential facility would be coded as residential placement.

Delinquency Cases

Delinquency offenses are acts committed by a juvenile that if committed by an adult could result in criminal prosecution. Juvenile courts handled an estimated 1,555,200 delinquency cases in 1994 (Table 1). A property offense was the most serious charge involved in 52% of these cases. The most serious charge was a person offense in 22% of the cases, a drug offense in 8%, and a public order offense in 19%. Larceny-theft, simple assault, burglary, vandalism, and obstruction of justice were the most common delinquency offenses seen by juvenile courts in 1994. Together, these five offenses made up nearly 60% of the delinquency cases processed during 1994.

Number of Cases

Between 1985 and 1994, the total number of delinquency cases handled by U.S. juvenile courts increased 41%. The largest relative percentage increases occurred in cases involving weapons offenses (156%), homicide (144%), and aggravated assault (134%). Offense categories showing the smallest increases or even decreases included liquor law violations (-34%), nonviolent sex offenses (-24%), and burglary (5%).

Table 1: Delinquency Cases by Most Serious Offense, 1994

Offense	Number of Cases	Percent Change 1985–94	1990–94	1993–94
Total Delinquency	**1,555,200**	**41%**	**20%**	**5%**
Person Offense	**336,100**	**93**	**38**	**6**
Criminal Homicide	3,000	144	19	6
Forcible Rape	5,400	25	21	11
Robbery	37,000	53	31	4
Aggravated Assault	85,300	134	41	10
Simple Assault	177,700	91	42	7
Other Violent Sex Offense	10,000	65	34	-9
Other Person Offense	17,800	91	12	-8
Property Offense	**803,400**	**22**	**7**	**0**
Burglary	141,600	5	-1	-5
Larceny-Theft	356,200	17	9	1
Motor Vehicle Theft	59,300	69	-16	-3
Arson	9,500	37	35	18
Vandalism	118,600	46	22	2
Trespassing	61,200	21	22	1
Stolen Property Offense	28,600	10	1	5
Other Property Offense	28,300	57	-3	-8
Drug Law Violations	**120,200**	**62**	**69**	**35**
Public Order Offense	**295,600**	**50**	**27**	**9**
Obstruction of Justice	108,400	59	26	13
Disorderly Conduct	80,700	77	44	14
Weapons Offense	48,800	156	63	4
Liquor Law Violation	12,700	-34	-29	-3
Nonviolent Sex Offense	9,600	-24	-23	-10
Other Public Order	35,500	10	15	4
Violent Crime Index *	**130,600**	**98**	**37**	**7**
Property Crime Index **	**566,700**	**17**	**4**	**-1**

* Violent Crime Index includes criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

** Property Crime Index includes burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Table 2: Percent Change in Delinquency Case Rates, 1985–1994

Offense	Case Rates 1985	1990	1994	Percent Change 1985–94	1990–94
Delinquency	42.0	50.7	56.1	33%	11%
Person	6.6	9.5	12.1	83	27
Property	25.1	29.3	29.0	16	-1
Drugs	2.8	2.8	4.3	54	56
Public Order	7.5	9.1	10.7	42	17

Case Rate = Cases per 1,000 youth at risk.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Table 3: Offense Profile of Delinquency Cases by Age at Referral, 1994

Offense	Age 15 or Younger	Age 16 or Older
Person	19%	18%
Property	61	53
Drugs	4	8
Public Order	16	21
Total	100%	100%

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Case Rates

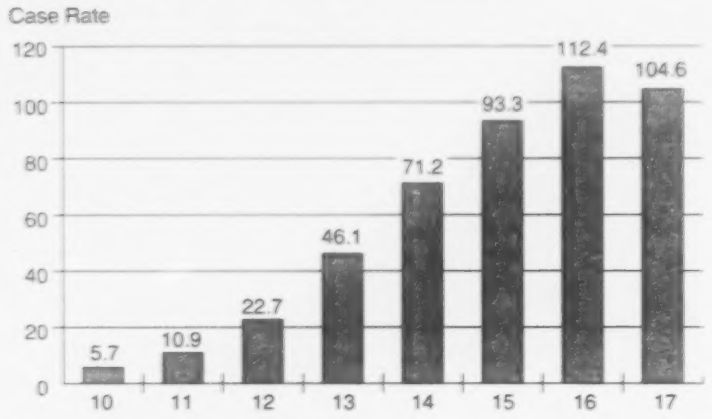
To examine changes in juvenile court caseloads while controlling for the size of the juvenile population, researchers calculated a case rate that represents the number of delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts for every 1,000 youth at risk of referral to a juvenile court.[2] Between 1985 and 1994, the total delinquency case rate increased 33%, from 42.0 to 56.1 cases disposed per 1,000 youth at risk (Table 2). During the same time period, the case rate for juveniles charged with person offenses increased 83%, as property offenses grew 16%, drug offenses increased 54%, and public order offenses increased 42%.

Age of Youth

Of all delinquency cases processed by the Nation's juvenile courts in 1994, 61% involved a juvenile under age 16. These younger youth were involved in 64% of person offense cases, 64% of property offense cases, 42% of drug law violations, and 55% of public order offense cases. Compared with older juveniles, the caseloads of younger youth involved a smaller proportion of drug law violations and public order offenses but somewhat larger proportions of person offenses and property offenses (Table 3).[3]

Delinquency case rates generally increase with age (Figure 1). For example, the delinquency case rate for 15-year-olds in 1994 was 31% higher than the rate for 14-year-olds (93.3 compared with 71.2 per 1,000 youth, respectively), and the case rate for 16-year-olds (112.4 per 1,000 youth) was 20% greater than that for 15-year-olds. The case rate for 17-year-olds (104.6 per 1,000) was an exception to this pattern because it was slightly lower than the rate for 16-year-olds.

Figure 1: Delinquency Case Rates by Age at Referral, 1994



Case Rate = Cases per 1,000 youth in age group.

Table 4: Percent Change in Delinquency Cases and Case Rates by Sex, 1985–1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994	Percent Change 1985–94	Percent Change 1990–94
Number of Cases					
Male	893,200	1,054,800	1,230,600	38%	17%
Person	139,700	194,500	258,300	85	33
Property	538,500	610,900	635,100	18	4
Drugs	61,100	61,400	103,900	70	69
Public Order	153,800	187,900	233,400	52	24
Female	210,600	244,500	324,600	54%	33%
Person	34,700	48,900	77,800	124	59
Property	120,000	140,600	168,300	40	20
Drugs	13,000	9,600	16,400	26	70
Public Order	43,000	45,300	62,200	45	37
Case Rates					
Male	66.4	80.3	86.5	30%	8%
Person	10.4	14.8	18.2	75	23
Property	40.0	46.5	44.7	12	-4
Drugs	4.5	4.7	7.3	61	56
Public Order	11.4	14.3	16.4	44	15
Female	16.4	19.6	24.0	46%	23%
Person	2.7	3.9	5.8	113	47
Property	9.4	11.3	12.5	33	10
Drugs	1.0	0.8	1.2	20	57
Public Order	3.4	3.6	4.6	37	27

Case Rate: Cases per 1,000 youth at risk.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Table 5: Percent Change in Delinquency Cases and Case Rates by Race, 1985–1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994	Percent Change 1985–94	Percent Change 1990–94
Number of Cases					
White	793,700	857,800	999,900	26%	17%
Person	100,300	135,300	190,200	90	41
Property	483,700	526,400	548,100	13	4
Drugs	58,900	38,500	72,800	24	89
Public Order	150,800	157,600	188,700	25	20
Black	281,000	397,400	498,700	78%	25%
Person	69,700	100,800	135,300	94	34
Property	156,900	198,100	222,000	41	12
Drugs	13,200	31,200	44,900	240	44
Public Order	41,200	67,300	96,600	135	43
Other Races	29,200	44,100	56,700	94%	29%
Person	4,400	7,400	10,600	142	44
Property	18,000	27,000	33,300	85	23
Drugs	2,000	1,400	2,500	21	75
Public Order	4,800	8,300	10,300	115	25
Case Rates					
White	37.0	41.7	45.2	22%	8%
Person	4.7	6.6	8.6	84	31
Property	22.6	25.6	24.8	10	-3
Drugs	2.7	1.9	3.3	20	76
Public Order	7.0	7.7	8.5	21	11
Black	72.5	103.0	119.4	65%	16%
Person	18.0	26.1	32.4	80	24
Property	40.5	51.3	53.1	31	4
Drugs	3.4	8.1	10.7	216	33
Public Order	10.6	17.4	23.1	117	32
Other Races	30.3	37.0	39.6	31%	7%
Person	4.5	6.2	7.4	63	20
Property	18.6	22.7	23.2	25	3
Drugs	2.1	1.2	1.7	-19	46
Public Order	5.0	6.9	7.2	45	4

Case Rate: Cases per 1,000 youth at risk.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Gender of Youth

Juvenile courts disposed 1.2 million delinquency cases involving males, compared with 324,600 cases involving females (Table 4). However, the number of delinquency cases involving females increased 54% between 1985 and 1994, while cases involving males increased 38%. The relatively greater increase in cases involving females resulted from changes in person offense cases (up 124% for females, versus 85% for males) and property offense cases (up 40% among females, compared with 18% among males). Drug violations and public order offense cases increased more among males than among females between 1985 and 1994, although the growth in cases involving females outpaced males between 1990 and 1994.

Between 1985 and 1994, the delinquency case rate for males increased 30% (from 66.4 to 86.5 cases per 1,000 youth). Among female juveniles, the delinquency case rate grew 46% (from 16.4 to 24.0 cases per 1,000). The person offense case rate for females was 113% higher in 1994 than in 1985, while the person offense case rate for males grew 75%. Still, the 1994 person offense case rate was more than three times greater for males than for females (18.2 versus 5.8 cases per 1,000).

Race of Youth

Between 1985 and 1994, the number of delinquency cases involving white youth increased 26%, and the number of cases involving black youth and youth of other races increased 78% and 94%, respectively (Table 5).[4] In 1994 the number of delinquency cases involving white youth exceeded the number involving black youth by a margin of 2 to 1, compared with a ratio of 2.8 to 1 in 1985.

The delinquency case rate for black youth was more than twice the rate for white youth in 1994 (119.4 compared with 45.2 per 1,000). The person offense case rate for black youth was nearly four times greater than the corresponding rate for white youth. The drug offense case rate for black youth was more than three times the rate for whites. Similarly, the property and public order offense case rates for blacks were more than double the rates for whites. In all offense categories, the case rate for juveniles of other races was lower than the corresponding rates for either black or white juveniles.

Property offense cases accounted for 55% of all 1994 delinquency cases involving white youth, 45% of those involving black youth, and 59% of those involving youth of other races. The black caseload involved a slightly higher proportion of person offense cases (27%) than either the white or other race caseloads (both 19%). Drug law violations accounted for a larger proportion of delinquency cases involving black youth (9%) than cases involving white youth (7%) or youth of other races (4%).

Table 6: Percent of Delinquency Cases Referred by Law Enforcement, 1985, 1990, and 1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994
Delinquency	82%	85%	86%
Person	78	84	86
Property	88	91	91
Drugs	91	92	94
Public Order	63	68	69

Table 7: Percent Change in Detained Delinquency Cases, 1985–1994

	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
Offense	1985	1990	1994	1985–94	1990–94
Delinquency	224,500	297,500	321,200	43%	8%
Person	42,900	65,700	81,800	90	25
Property	113,000	141,300	134,200	19	-5
Drugs	15,800	26,600	33,400	111	25
Public Order	52,700	63,900	71,800	36	12

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Source of Referral

A number of sources—law enforcement agencies, social services, schools, parents, probation officers, and victims—referred delinquency cases to juvenile courts. Although there were variations across offense categories, 86% of all 1994 delinquency case referrals made to juvenile courts were by a law enforcement agency (Table 6). Law enforcement agencies referred 86% of person offense cases, 91% of property offense cases, 94% of drug law violation cases, and 69% of public order offense cases.

Use of Detention

On occasion, juveniles are held in secure detention facilities before adjudication and disposition. Detention is sometimes necessary to protect the community, to protect the juvenile, to ensure his or her appearance at scheduled hearings, or to allow for evaluation. Juveniles were detained in 21% of the delinquency cases disposed by U.S. juvenile courts in 1994. Nearly half of these cases involved juveniles charged with property offenses (Table 7).

The number of delinquency cases involving detention increased 43% between 1985 and 1994. Person offense cases involving detention increased 90%, and the number of drug offense cases involving detention climbed 111% during the same 10-year period. Although property offense cases involving detention fell 5% between 1990 and 1994, the number of detained property offense cases in 1994 was still 19% greater than in 1985.

The probability of detention for delinquency cases changed very little between 1985 and 1994 (Table 8). The use of detention increased from 20% to 23% of all cases between 1985 and 1990 and then declined to 21% in 1994. The same pattern was seen in three of the four major offense categories (person, property, and public order offenses). The use of detention for drug law violation cases also decreased between 1990 and 1994, but unlike the other offense categories, the use of detention for drug offense cases remained substantially higher in 1994 than in 1985 (28% versus 21%).

In 1994 the likelihood of detention in cases involving white juveniles was 17%, while it was 28% for those involving black juveniles and 22% for juveniles of other races (Table 9). The proportion of delinquency cases that involved detention fell between 1990 and 1994 for all racial categories. Compared with 1985, the use of detention in 1994 was comparable or slightly lower for most groups of offenders. The single exception was the proportion of cases involving black juveniles charged with drug law violations, which were more likely to involve detention in 1994 than they were in 1985 (44% compared with 34%).

Table 8: Percent of Delinquency Cases Detained by Sex, 1985, 1990, and 1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994
Delinquency	20%	23%	21%
Person	25	27	24
Property	17	19	17
Drugs	21	37	28
Public Order	27	27	24
Male	21%	24%	22%
Person	26	29	26
Property	18	20	18
Drugs	22	39	29
Public Order	26	28	25
Female	18%	18%	16%
Person	18	19	18
Property	13	14	12
Drugs	19	28	20
Public Order	28	26	22

Table 9: Percent of Delinquency Cases Detained by Race, 1985, 1990, and 1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994
White	18%	20%	17%
Person	21	23	21
Property	15	17	14
Drugs	18	27	18
Public Order	25	26	21
Black	26%	29%	28%
Person	29	31	29
Property	22	24	23
Drugs	34	51	44
Public Order	32	31	31
Other Races	24%	29%	22%
Person	29	38	29
Property	20	24	19
Drugs	25	34	21
Public Order	36	33	23

Case Processing

When a delinquency case is referred to juvenile court, an intake officer, judge, or prosecutor determines whether to handle the case formally or informally. Formal handling involves the filing of a petition requesting that the court hold an adjudicatory or waiver hearing. Informal case handling is conducted entirely at the juvenile court intake level, without a petition and without an adjudicatory or waiver hearing.

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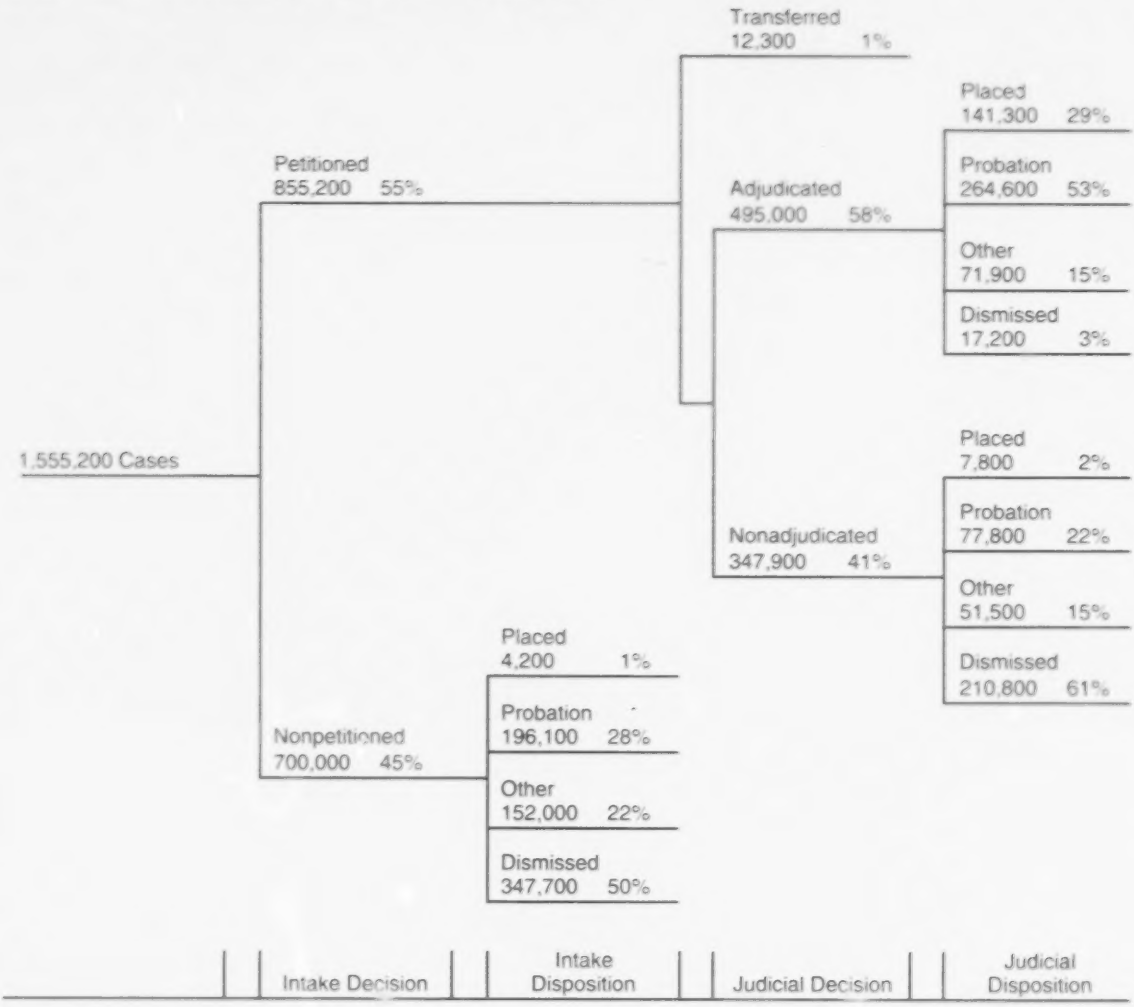
Figure 2: Juvenile Court Processing of Delinquency Cases, 1994



Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Table 10: Percent Change in Petitioned Delinquency Cases, 1985–1994

Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1985	1990	1994	1985–94	1990–94
Delinquency	505,400	656,400	855,200	69%	30%
Person	94,700	135,600	196,900	108	45
Property	289,300	356,600	415,800	44	17
Drugs	32,200	46,800	73,400	128	57
Public Order	89,100	117,400	169,100	90	44

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

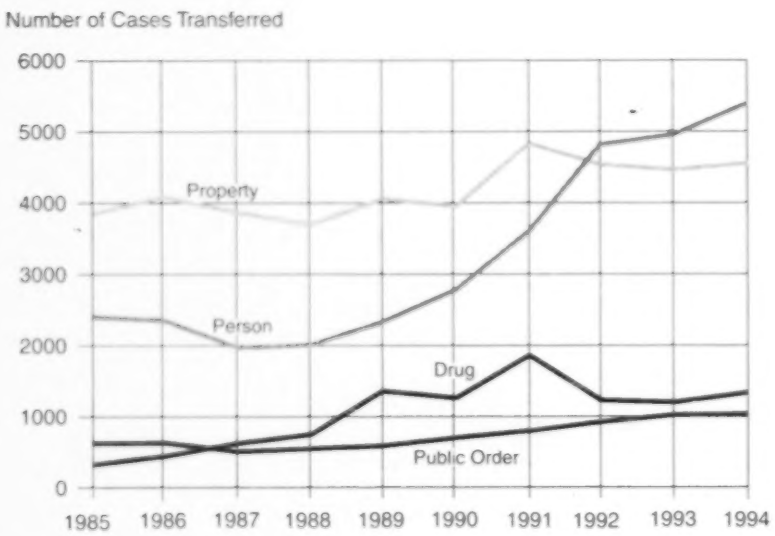
In 1994 more than half of all delinquency cases were handled formally (Figure 2). Formal processing for delinquency referrals increased from 46% to 55% between 1985 and 1994. The increased number of cases referred to juvenile court intake and the greater likelihood of formal handling resulted in a 69% increase between 1985 and 1994 in the number of petitioned delinquency cases disposed by U.S. juvenile courts (Table 10). The largest percentage increase was in the number of petitioned drug offense cases, which increased 128% from 1985 to 1994. The number of petitioned person offense cases increased 108%, petitioned

Table 11: Percent Change in Petitioned Delinquency Cases Transferred to Criminal Court, 1985–1994

Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1985	1990	1994	1985–94	1990–94
Delinquency	7,200	8,700	12,300	71%	42%
Person	2,400	2,800	5,400	125	94
Property	3,900	4,000	4,600	18	15
Drugs	300	1,300	1,300	308	6
Public Order	600	700	1,000	66	47

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Figure 3: Delinquency Cases Transferred to Criminal Court, 1985–1994



property offense cases increased 44%, and petitioned public order offense cases grew 90%.

Criminal Court Transfer. One of the first actions taken during the juvenile court intake process is determining whether a case should be processed in the criminal justice system rather than in the juvenile court. The mechanisms used to transfer a case from juvenile to adult court vary by State. In some States, a prosecutor may file juvenile cases that meet certain criteria directly in criminal court. In other States, a juvenile court judge must authorize all transfers by waiving the juvenile court's jurisdiction over the case. This Bulletin analyzes only those cases transferred to criminal court by judicial waiver.

The number of delinquency cases transferred to criminal court grew 71% between 1985 and 1994 (Table 11). The largest group of cases transferred in 1994 involved person offenses, which accounted for more than two in five cases transferred to criminal court. Between 1985 and 1994, the number of transferred drug offense cases increased far more (308%) than transfers of any other type of case (for example, 125% among person offense cases and 66% among property offense cases). However, all of the increase in transferred drug offense cases occurred between 1985 and 1990.

Cases transferred to criminal court represented 1.4% of all petitioned delinquency cases in 1994, the same proportion

Table 12: Percent of Petitioned Delinquency Cases Transferred to Criminal Court, 1985, 1990, and 1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994
Delinquency	1.4%	1.3%	1.4%
Person	2.5	2.0	2.7
Property	1.3	1.1	1.1
Drugs	1.0	2.7	1.8
Public Order	0.7	0.6	0.6

Table 13: Percent of Petitioned Delinquency Cases Adjudicated, 1985, 1990, and 1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994
Delinquency	66%	61%	58%
Person	58	55	54
Property	67	62	58
Drugs	70	61	60
Public Order	69	63	60

as 1985 (Table 12). In 1985 and 1994, the cases most likely to be transferred were those involving person offenses. In contrast, drug offense cases were most likely to be transferred in 1990. The offense profile of cases transferred to criminal court changed considerably between 1985 and 1994. While the number of transferred property offense cases increased from slightly less than 4,000 cases in 1985 to approximately 4,600 cases in 1994, the number of transferred person offense cases more than doubled, increasing from 2,400 cases in 1985 to 5,400 cases in 1994 (Figure 3). Person offense cases grew from a low of 28% of all transfers in 1987 to 44% of cases transferred in 1994.

Adjudication and Disposition. Except in cases where a criminal-court transfer is granted, an adjudicatory hearing is generally held in all formally petitioned delinquency cases.[5] During the hearing, the court determines whether a youth will be adjudicated as a delinquent. The court then makes a dispositional decision that could include fines, restitution, probation, commitment to a residential facility, referral to a treatment program, or community service.

In 1994, 58% of all formally processed delinquency cases resulted in adjudication (Table 13). In 29% of these cases, the youth was placed out of the home in a

Table 14: Percent of Adjudicated Delinquency Cases Placed Out of Home, 1985, 1990, and 1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994
Delinquency	28%	31%	29%
Person	31	34	31
Property	25	27	25
Drugs	23	36	28
Public Order	36	38	33

Table 15: Percent of Adjudicated Delinquency Cases Placed on Formal Probation, 1985, 1990, and 1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994
Delinquency	57%	57%	53%
Person	56	56	54
Property	58	60	55
Drugs	62	55	52
Public Order	51	52	49

Table 16: Percent Change in Petitioned Status Offense Cases and Case Rates, 1985–1994

Offense	1985	1990	1994	Percent Change 1985–94	Percent Change 1990–94
Number of Cases					
Status Offense	76,300	92,700	126,900	66%	37%
Runaway	17,200	15,100	21,500	25	42
Truancy	21,800	26,900	36,400	67	35
Ungovernable	17,000	12,600	15,700	-7	25
Liquor	15,500	29,200	33,600	117	15
Miscellaneous	4,800	9,000	19,800	315	121
Case Rates					
Status Offense	2.9	3.6	4.6	58%	26%
Runaway	0.7	0.6	0.8	18	32
Truancy	0.8	1.1	1.3	58	25
Ungovernable	0.6	0.5	0.6	-12	15
Liquor	0.6	1.1	1.2	105	6
Miscellaneous	0.2	0.4	0.7	293	104

Case Rate: Cases per 1,000 youth at risk.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

residential facility (Table 14). More than half (53%) of all formally adjudicated delinquency cases resulted in the juvenile being placed on formal probation (Table 15). In 15% of formally adjudicated delinquency cases, the court ordered the juvenile to pay restitution or a fine, participate in some form of community service, or to enter a treatment or counseling program. In a small number of cases (3%), the juvenile was adjudicated but the case was then dismissed or the youth was otherwise released.

In 1994, two in five formally handled delinquency cases were not subsequently adjudicated. Most (61%) of these cases were dismissed by the court, but in 22% of the cases, the juvenile agreed to some form of probation. Approximately 2% of all nonadjudicated delinquency cases resulted in voluntary out-of-home placement. In 15% of nonadjudicated cases, the juvenile agreed to another informal disposition such as restitution, community service, or referral to an agency for services.

Petitioned Status Offense Cases

Status offenses are acts for which only juveniles can be arrested. A status offense is an otherwise legal act that is considered illegal only because of the juvenile *status* of the person committing the act. The four major status offense categories analyzed here are runaway, truancy, ungovernability (sometimes known as incorrigibility, or being beyond the control of one's parents), and liquor law violations (minor in possession of alcohol, underage drinking, etc.).

Number of Cases

In 1994 U.S. juvenile courts petitioned and formally disposed an estimated 126,900 status offense cases (Table 16).[6] In 36,400 of these cases, the most serious charge was truancy. A liquor law violation was the most serious charge in 33,600 cases, runaway in 21,500 cases, and ungovernability in 15,700 cases. Other miscellaneous status offenses (such as curfew violations, tobacco offenses, etc.) accounted for the remaining 19,800 cases.[7]

Between 1985 and 1994, the number of petitioned status offense cases seen in U.S. juvenile courts increased 66%. Status cases involving liquor violations climbed 117%, truancy cases increased 67%, and the number of cases involving charges of runaway grew 25%. During that 10-year period, the largest proportionate increase in formally processed status offense cases was in the "miscellaneous" category, possibly reflecting an increase in referrals for curfew violations but also indicating growth in the other status violations.

Case Rates

The Nation's juvenile courts processed 4.6 petitioned status offense cases for every 1,000 youth at risk of referral in 1994. The total status offense case rate was 58% higher in 1994 than in 1985. The rate for runaway cases increased 18% between 1985 and 1994, the truancy rate increased 58%, the rate of status liquor law violations increased 105%, and the rate of miscellaneous status offense cases climbed 293%. Cases involving ungovernability decreased between 1985 and 1994, although the 1994 case rate (0.6 per 1,000) was 15% higher than the rate in 1990 (0.5 per 1,000).

Age of Youth

In 1994, 57% of the petitioned status offense cases disposed by juvenile courts involved a youth under age 16, compared with 69% of the 1985 caseload. The most common status offense for youth under age 16 was truancy (38%). Among older youth the most common status offense

Table 17: Offense Profile of Petitioned Status Offense Cases by Age at Referral, 1994

Offense	Age 15 or Younger	Age 16 or Older
Runaway	20%	14%
Truancy	38	16
Ungovernable	15	9
Liquor	11	46
Miscellaneous	16	15
Total	100%	100%

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Table 18: Percent Change in Detained Petitioned Status Offense Cases, 1985–1994

Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1985	1990	1994	1985–94	1990–94
Status Offense	13,500	7,900	9,000	-33%	14%
Runaway	5,800	2,300	3,300	-44	43
Truancy	1,800	800	800	-57	2
Ungovernable	3,600	1,100	1,200	-68	2
Liquor	1,500	2,200	1,200	-16	-44
Miscellaneous	800	1,600	2,600	221	64

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

was a liquor law violation, which accounted for 46% of all cases involving a youth age 16 or older (Table 17).

Gender of Youth

Male juveniles were involved in 58% of the petitioned status offense cases handled by juvenile courts during 1994. More than two in three liquor law violation cases involved males (69%). On the other hand, the majority of runaway cases involved females (60%). Males and females were more equally represented in truancy and ungovernability cases. In 1994, 54% of truancy cases and 53% of ungovernability cases involved male juveniles.

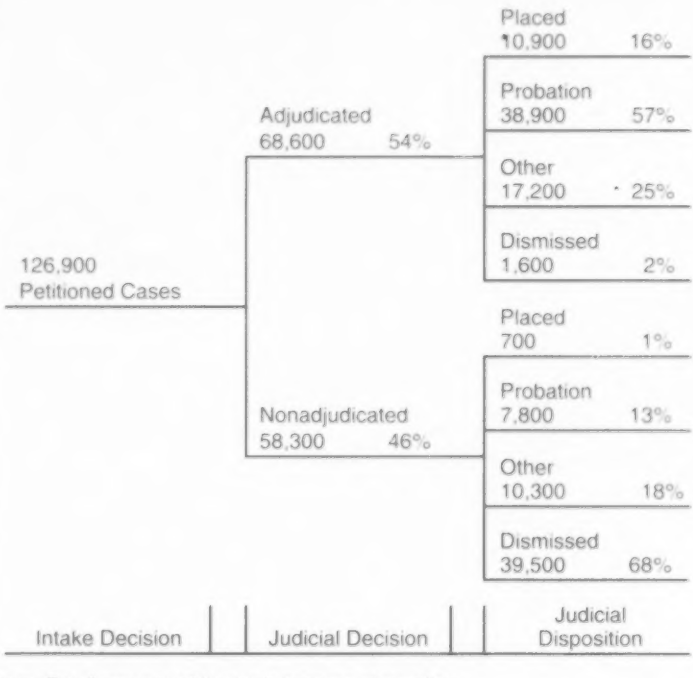
Race of Youth

White youth were involved in 77% of the petitioned status offense cases disposed by juvenile courts in 1994, compared with 81% in 1985. White youth were involved in 76% of runaway cases, 73% of truancy cases, 72% of ungovernability cases, and 89% of status liquor law violation cases. Truancy was the most common status offense for black youth (37%), while a liquor law violation was the most common status offense for cases of white youth (30%) and youth of other races (41%).

Source of Referral

Law enforcement agencies referred 44% of the petitioned status offense cases handled by juvenile courts in 1994. However, the source of referral varied according to the offense involved. Law enforcement agencies referred 94% of status liquor law violation cases, 40% of runaway cases, 9% of truancy cases, and 10% of ungovernability cases.

Figure 4: Juvenile Court Processing of Petitioned Status Offense Cases, 1994



Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Use of Detention

Detention was used in 9,000 petitioned status offense cases in 1994 (Table 18). The number of status offense cases involving detention in 1994 was 33% smaller than in 1985 but 14% greater than in 1990. This pattern in the use of detention was seen in all offense categories with the exception of cases involving "miscellaneous" status offenses, which climbed continuously from 800 to 2,600 cases between 1985 and 1994.

Runaway cases were the most likely to involve detention in 1994. Detention was used in 15% of runaway cases, 13% of the miscellaneous status offense cases, 7% of ungovernability cases, 4% of status liquor law violations, and 2% of truancy cases.

Of the estimated 9,000 petitioned status offense cases that involved detention in 1994, 36% were runaway cases, 8% were truancy cases, 13% involved ungovernability charges, 13% involved liquor violations, and 29% involved miscellaneous status offenses.

Case Processing

During 1994, 54% of petitioned status offense cases resulted in adjudication (Figure 4). Adjudication was most likely in cases involving ungovernability and liquor law violations (57% of both categories) and least likely in runaway cases (45%). Probation was the most common disposition for adjudicated status offenders. Nearly three in five (57%) adjudicated status offense cases resulted in probation, 16% resulted in out-of-home placement, 25% resulted in other sanctions such as restitution or community service, and 2% were dismissed.

Endnotes

1. For information on the estimation procedure, see the "methods" section in this Bulletin or in *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994*. The national estimates for 1985 through 1993 described in this Bulletin include revisions made after publication of previous *Juvenile Court Statistics* reports.
2. Population at risk of referral controls for State variations in the ages covered by juvenile court jurisdiction. Juveniles at risk are defined as youth age 10 or older who were at or under the upper age of original jurisdiction of the juvenile court according to the laws of their State. In most States, the upper age of original jurisdiction is 17 years, but the age ranged from 15 to 17 years in 1994.
3. Care should be exercised when interpreting age, sex, or racial differences in the handling of juvenile delinquency cases; reported statistics do not control for the seriousness of the behavior leading to each charge or the extent of a youth's court history.
4. Nearly all youth of Hispanic ethnicity are included in the white racial category.
5. In a small number of cases, the petition is withdrawn before an adjudicatory hearing is held.
6. In many communities, social service agencies, rather than the juvenile courts, have assumed responsibility for screening and diverting alleged status offenders. Because of great differences in intake and screening procedures for informally handled status offense cases, national estimates are not calculated. The national estimates presented here and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* focus on formally handled, or petitioned status offense cases. Readers interested in further information on informally handled status offense cases can review the subnational statistics presented in the *Detailed Supplement to Juvenile Court Statistics 1994*.
7. Due to the heterogeneity of offenses contained in the "miscellaneous" category, these cases are not always discussed independently. All totals in the tables and figures, however, include "miscellaneous status offenses."

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About the National Juvenile Court Data Archive

This Bulletin presents information from the latest report in OJJDP's *Juvenile Court Statistics* series. The *Juvenile Court Statistics* report series started in 1929 and continues to be the Nation's primary source of information on the activities of juvenile courts. The data for the reports are collected, analyzed, and stored by the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is operated by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Archive collects demographic, legal, and dispositional data on more than 700,000 delinquency and status offense cases annually. In addition to producing *Juvenile Court Statistics* and other topical publications, the Archive can provide data files and special analyses for research and policy purposes.

The Archive's national delinquency estimates are available to researchers in an easy-to-use software package, *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics*. With the support of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, NCJJ distributes the software to facilitate independent analysis of Archive data while eliminating the need for statistical analysis software. All necessary data files as well as the NCJJ software are available on a single 3½-inch diskette that may be installed on any IBM-compatible personal computer or network. To order a complementary copy of *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics*, contact NCJJ, 412–227–6950.

For further information about the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, contact:

National Center for Juvenile Justice
710 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219–3000
412–227–6950

To obtain *Juvenile Court Statistics*, other publications using Archive data or OJJDP publications that focus on juvenile justice statistics, contact:

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse
Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849–6000
800–638–8736

Glossary

Adjudication: Judicial determination (judgment) that a youth is a delinquent or status offender.

Age: Juvenile's age at the time the case was referred to juvenile court.

Case Rate: Number of cases disposed per 1,000 youth at risk. The population base used to calculate the case rate varies. For example, the population base for the male case rate is the total number of male youth age 10 or older who are under the jurisdiction of the juvenile courts. (See *Youth Population at Risk*.)

Delinquent Act: An act committed by a juvenile for which an adult could be prosecuted in a criminal court, but when committed by a juvenile is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. Delinquent acts include crimes against persons, crimes against property, drug offenses, and crimes against public order when such acts are committed by juveniles.

Detention: The placement of a youth in a restrictive facility between the time of referral to court intake and case disposition.

Disposition: Definite action taken or treatment plan decided upon or initiated in a particular case. Case dispositions are coded into the following categories:

- **Transfer to Criminal Court**: Cases that were sent to a criminal court as the result of a waiver or transfer hearing in the juvenile court.
- **Placement**: Cases in which youth were placed out of the home in a residential facility for delinquents or status offenders or cases in which youth were removed from their homes and placed elsewhere.
- **Probation**: Cases in which youth were placed on informal/voluntary or formal/court-ordered probation or supervision.
- **Dismissed**: Cases dismissed, including those warned, counseled, and released, with no further disposition anticipated. Among cases handled informally, some may be dismissed by the juvenile court because the matter is being handled in criminal court (see *Manner of Handling*).
- **Other**: Miscellaneous dispositions not included above, which may include fines, restitution, community service, referrals outside the court for services with minimal or no further court involvement anticipated, and dispositions coded as "other" in a jurisdiction's original data.

Juvenile: Youth at or below the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction. (See *Upper Age of Jurisdiction* and *Youth Population at Risk*.)

Juvenile Court: Any court that has jurisdiction over matters involving juveniles.

Manner of Handling: A general classification of case processing within the court system.

- **Petitioned**: Formally handled cases that appear on the official court calendar in response to the filing of a petition or other legal instrument requesting the court to adjudicate the youth a delinquent, a status offender, or a dependent child or to transfer the youth to criminal court for processing as an adult.
- **Nonpetitioned**: Informally handled cases in which duly authorized court personnel screen for adjustment before the filing of a formal petition. Such personnel include judges, referees, probation officers, other officers of the court, and/or an agency statutorily designated to conduct petition screening for the juvenile court.

Petition: A document filed in juvenile court alleging that a juvenile is a delinquent or a status offender and asking that the court assume jurisdiction over the juvenile or asking that an alleged delinquent be transferred to criminal court for prosecution as an adult.

Race: The race of the youth referred as determined by the youth or by court personnel.

- **White**: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East. (In both the population and court data, nearly all Hispanics were included in the white racial category.)
- **Black**: A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
- **Other**: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America, the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands.

Unit of Count: The unit of count is a case disposed by a court with juvenile jurisdiction during the calendar year. Each case represents a youth referred to the juvenile court for a new referral for one or more offenses. The term "disposed" means that during the year some definite action was taken or some treatment plan was decided upon or initiated. Within this definition, it is possible for a youth to be involved in more than one case during a calendar year.

Upper Age of Original Jurisdiction: The oldest age at which a juvenile court has original jurisdiction over an individual for law-violating behavior. For the time period covered by *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994*, the upper age of jurisdiction was 15 in three States (Connecticut, New York, and North Carolina) and 16 in eight States (Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas). In the remaining 39 States and the District of Columbia, the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction was 17. It must be noted that in most States, there are exceptions in which youth at or below the State's upper age of jurisdiction can be placed under the original jurisdiction of the adult criminal court. For example, in most States if a youth of a certain age is charged with an offense from a defined list of "excluded offenses," the case must originate in the adult criminal court. In addition, in a number of States, the district attorney is given the discretion of filing certain cases either in the juvenile or in the criminal court. Therefore, while the upper age of jurisdiction is commonly recognized in all States, there are numerous exceptions to this age criterion.

Youth Population at Risk: For delinquency and status offense matters, this term refers to the number of children from age 10 through the upper age of original jurisdiction. In all States the upper age of jurisdiction is defined by statute. Because most States consider individuals to be adults on their 18th birthday, the delinquency and status offense youth population at risk in these States equals the number of children 10 through 17 years of age living within the geographical area serviced by the court. (See *Upper Age of Jurisdiction*.)

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Methods

Data are provided to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive by State and local agencies responsible for the collection and/or dissemination of juvenile justice data. The information contributed by these agencies is not derived from a probability sampling procedure nor is it the result of a uniform data collection effort. The national estimates described in this Bulletin and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* are developed using information from all courts able to provide compatible data to the Archive. While juvenile courts with jurisdiction over 96% of the U.S. juvenile population contributed at least some 1994 data to the Archive, not all information could be used to generate the national estimates because of incompatibilities in the structure or content of the data files.

Data are provided to the Archive in two forms—automated *case-level* data and *court-level aggregate* data. Automated case-level data, which describe each case's demographic and processing characteristics, were provided by 1,405 jurisdictions in 26 States (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin). Together, the contributing jurisdictions from these States contained 51% of the Nation's juvenile population and handled 761,897 delinquency cases in 1994.

Court-level aggregate data, which usually indicate the number of delinquency cases disposed in a calendar year, were provided by an additional 411 jurisdictions in 5 States (Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Vermont, and Washington) and the District of Columbia. In 1994 these jurisdictions handled 191,789 delinquency cases. In all, compatible data were provided to the Archive by 1,816 jurisdictions in 1994, containing 67% of the Nation's juvenile population (i.e., youth age 10 through the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction in each State).

The national estimates of juvenile court cases reported in this Bulletin and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* were developed using the Archive's case-level and court-level data files combined with county-level juvenile population estimates (controlling for the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each State). The basic assumption underlying the estimation procedure is that the volume and characteristics of juvenile court cases are shaped by the same set of factors in reporting and nonreporting jurisdictions of similar size. For interested readers, a complete description of the estimation procedure appears in the "methods" section of each *Juvenile Court Statistics* report.

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